

environmental update

Industry to unite on sustainability standard

By Julie Goodman

The A&D community has embraced the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) LEED standards for sustainable buildings and interiors, which can earn points to qualify certified, silver, gold or platinum ratings.

Designers initially complained about the proliferation of confusing claims and ratings for carpet products. Already suspicious of the possibilities of "greenwashing" by marketers, architects were asking for a trustworthy, recognized standard to use when specifying carpet products that will help their project earn LEED rating points.

The Carpet & Rug Institute (CRI) convened a group representing stakeholders in the standards issue, which has been working with the Institute for Marketing for Transformation to Sustainability (MTS) and Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) to develop a consensus on an all-industry standard. Last December CRI announced that the group, which includes a private certifying company once perceived as a rival, had approved a unified national textile standard and is now working to finalize administrative issues and develop a guidance document.

"We now have a standard developed through a consensus process based on a product's life-cycle analysis that is well defined and auditable," said Robert Peoples, PhD, senior director for sustainability, CRI, and executive director of CARE (Carpet America Recovery Effort). "A group of very knowledgeable content experts have done all the work so architects, designers and specifiers can confidently rely on using the standard."

The new standard represents a great deal of progress made since *Floor Covering Weekly* reported on the efforts by the carpet industry to develop and agree on a sustainability standard for rating or certifying carpet products as green (*FCW*, Jan. 12, 2004). Echoing the LEED ratings, the new standard rates textile products for four increasingly stringent levels of certification: Sustainable Textile Achievement, Silver Sustainable Textile Achievement, Gold/EPP Sustainable Textile Achievement and Platinum/EPP Sustainable Textile Achievement.

Last year a controversy was brewing over a standard to govern the carpet industry in the absence of a national standard. Presidential Executive Order 13101 (1998) directs federal agencies and their contractors to voluntarily identify and purchase products designated as "environmentally preferable." However, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did not establish any federal standards for such products. Would the industry come up with a self-policing standard? Or might it adopt a third-party standard offered by one or more outside certifying entities, something akin to the "UL" rating for electric products?

The CRI already had in place its Green Label testing program for environmentally friendly products, but it did not meet the stringent demands of California's new (2003) Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) specifications, known as Section 01350 or "1350." LEED has adopted 1350, at least until the USGBC revises the LEED EB — for existing buildings — standards. Last June CRI launched its new Green Label Plus independent testing program, which approves carpet products that meet or exceed California's regulations.

SCS, a private company in California, worked with DuPont/Invista to come up with an Environmentally Preferable Products (EPP) standard for carpet. The certification was almost entirely used only by DuPont/Invista-related or aligned mills that had earned EPP certification for products made with, for example, Invista's Antron® nylon. (Some fiber products by Honeywell are also EPP certified.)

Interestingly, some manufacturers saw the EPP standard as a challenge to their ability to regulate themselves. "Maybe some manufacturers need that kind of policing, but we don't in our business," said James Lesslie, president of Beaulieu Commercial. "The real standard is LEED; we are interested in how our products contribute to a LEED project. I'm not going to spend \$20,000 or \$30,000 for someone to tell me that we are doing something good. Don't our companies have any credibility at all?"

Others even questioned SCS' integrity, because the EPP standard's language closely followed that of Executive Order 13101. And "EPP," incidentally, is the same acronym used on the EPA's website, referring to "Environment, Price & Performance." But the EPP standard was widely recognized as being scientifically based and of high quality.

The solution was for CRI to work together with SCS to come up with an all-industry standard that would be a compromise solution. "We have nothing against SCS, and we are very supportive of the industry getting to one standard as a blended effort," Lesslie said.

SCS' Kirsten Ritchie, PE, director of environmental claims certification, was a key person in developing the all-industry standard — of which EPP certification is still required to achieve the two highest levels: gold and platinum. "We have been working together very closely in one large, collaborative effort to see if we could achieve consensus on a standard — perhaps not owned or managed by CRI — that could be applied across the industry for carpet and textiles," said Jeff Stephens, SCS communications director. "We thought it was important to demonstrate a good faith effort and work collaboratively with the other players. We didn't want to be perceived as complete outsiders who want to come in and impose our will on the industry with some fringe EPP program."

At the same time, Stephens noted SCS won't back a process that is insufficient. "The most important thing to us is to maintain our independence and integrity," he said. "A third-party certification has more credibility."

The end result was the sustainable textile standard released last December, in which SCS would be the auditor for the higher tiers. "Now the standard is out there," Stephens said. "The next process is a lot of work to interpret the details and have it be functional on the ground. We're working



BOLYU Contract's new After Eight Collection is constructed of Honeywell's Zeftron Solure nylon with enviro6ix.

on that with members of CRI representing their own companies and Bob Peoples [representing CARE and CRI]."

The unified standard

The textile standard will meet the A&D community's needs for clear information. The product standard covers five key issues, each having a number of points that can be earned in its category for the product:

- safety for public health and environment
- renewable energy and energy efficiency
- bio-based or recycled materials
- facility- or company-based manufacturing
- reclamation, sustainable reuse & end-of-life management

The consensus-based standard is quite comprehensive, aiming to achieve multiple environmental, social and economic benefits over the supply chain. Its stated promise of business benefits for manufacturers include cost savings, design innovation, product differentiation, long-term customer relationships and liability reduction.

"We wanted a unified standard to remove the ambiguity in the marketplace and reduce greenwashing," CRI's Peoples said.

The standard's ultimate recognition would go to products that — through all stages, including the entire supply chain — can demonstrate: a 100-percent reduction of more than 1,300 pollutants; a 100-percent use of green, "e-renewable" power; 100-percent post-consumer, recycled or organic/BMP (best manufacturing practices) bio-based materials; and 100-percent reuse and product reclamation at the end of the product's life.

The unified standard is likely to be accepted by the industry, observers say. "We will continue to carry and use our SCS EPP labels until the standard is finalized and certification is available," said Lynn Preston, technical environmental manager, C&A (Tandus). "All the details of the transition have not yet been spelled out for companies currently holding the SCS EPP certification." **FCW**